



State of Cortland County Address

June 27, 2013

Good evening and welcome to our 2013 State of the County address. I begin tonight by greeting my fellow legislators, County Administrator Murphy, County Attorney Purser, media representatives and guests. As Chairman, I want to thank legislators for their hard work throughout this term. We may not have agreed on all issues, but we have resolved the majority of them with respect for each other and for the betterment of our County.

The state of our county is strong and we are becoming better prepared for the next decade. Cortland County provides vital services such as the road patrol and jail; fire safety; building and maintaining an adequate and dependable network of highways and roads; Solid waste disposal and recycling and many more services. We do this with pride, and I thank our department heads and all County employees for the effort they put into their jobs every day.

However, we are still faced with many uncertainties that are beyond our control. New York State continues to become more demanding on counties to fund State programs with little to no mandate relief in sight. This has put a great strain on addressing the needs of our citizens and the fiscal health of the County.

State-mandated programs consume \$.87 of every property tax levy dollar paid by Cortland County property owners, leaving us only \$.13 out of every dollar to provide those non-mandated services that we all rely on. New York State needs to change the way it looks at counties and stop using them as a bank to fund state programs. Cortland County provides vital services that ensure a desirable quality of life for Cortland County and we must strive to retain them.

In my County address last year I stated we were at 93% of our constitutional taxing limit. The good news is that we were able to lower that this past year to approximately 86%. We are headed in the right direction, but more work must be done to ensure Cortland County remains financially healthy in the coming years. Last year Cortland County was listed by the NYS Comptroller as financially stressed. The good news is we are out of the distressed category, but more work needs to be done.

Cortland County's annual payroll of approximately \$25 million will continue to increase by 1.5% or \$375,000 over the next few years. I am thankful to our unions and our negotiating teams for their willingness and cooperation in reaching fair and reasonable employment contracts.

Sales Tax

We have now started our first year with a new sales tax agreement and projections are exceeding what was budgeted for the County, city, towns and villages. The doom and gloom that was predicted by a few has not proven to be true, and all municipalities will share in an increase in sales tax revenue.

As you all are aware, we have been trying to work out a plan with the city to pay off our Motorola lease for the interoperable radio system early, but at this point, it's not looking promising. But we will continue to pursue all avenues to see if we can save interest dollars for all taxpayers in the County.

Public Safety

Over the course of the last 12 months our County has seen a dramatic increase in meth labs and drugs of all kinds. Our Sheriff's Department has been working very diligently and effectively in shutting down these operations. As you all are well aware, last fall the Sheriff's Department, city police, state police, and federal marshals worked together to take out a large drug network in Cortland County that stretched statewide.

Law enforcement is one of the largest and most vital non-mandated County services that we provide. Arrests continue to increase, our jail is always full, and we are forced to board out inmates to other counties at a considerable cost.

This is why I have asked our JPS committee to start working with the Sheriff's Department and others to explore options with our jail facilities. Potential options include a new jail, or a regional jail working with Tompkins and/or other counties. Consensus is our inmate population is not going to decrease in the near future so we need to be exploring options to accommodate this unfortunate type of growth. The reality that we are faced with is that boarding out inmates is very costly, and the associated transportation costs to and from court appearances, medical appearances, etc. is becoming a drain on our county budget.

Highway Department

This legislature has long known the need for highway maintenance, but in the past has done little to provide financing to fund it. That all changed this past two years with our commitment to repair culverts, bridges, black topping and finishing roads. Little York Lake Dam replacement will be completed in 2014. With the vision of Dave Fuller, highway superintendent Don Chambers and County administrative Martin Murphy we have approved a five-year plan that will bond for these important projects and greatly improves our infrastructure for years to come. Highway projects are often the first to be cut during the budget process, but we cannot afford to let up in completing these projects that greatly affect this County and its ability to attract businesses and to keep current businesses and farms productive and profitable.

Solid Waste Program

In October 2012 the County contracted with Casella for the operation of the County recycling center, reducing the operations and maintenance costs with the hopes of increasing volume and revenue by switching to a single stream recycling process. All indications so far are that this has been a cost-saving move.

After years of debate over various cost reductions and potential revenue sources at the landfill, the county has authorized the acceptance of beneficial use determination, better known as BUD material. This cover material will reduce the amount of shale used for cover, which comes at a cost, and instead creates a revenue source. Implementing this change was a long process that heard testimony from all sides, which helped create a safe and effective way to test and utilize this material. Accepting BUD material is only one small step. New mandated regulations coming from New York State in the near future will further increase the cost of operation. We need to be looking to make other changes at our landfill site, and we will be hearing more in the near future on our solid waste operations.

Judiciary & Public Safety Committee

The Interoperable Communications project really started many years ago with the discussion and planning of a new system. This legislature through the leadership of Kevin Whitney and the Communications Advisory Board has brought it to fruition. We are only a few weeks away from going live. This new system has put Cortland County on the map as a model operation for implementing the FCC narrow banding mandate. Many thanks to all who were involved in securing \$10 million worth of grants to apply towards this project.

As I stated last year we needed to create a new department to oversee this \$14 million project to be able to make decisions about its maintenance and operation, and to help oversee 911/dispatching fire and emergency operations. This legislature had the vision to create a new director of emergency communications position, and we were very fortunate to be able to hire Scott Roman. His expertise has averted an extremely expensive upgrade to the existing New World system thereby saving hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars.

We have made many strides in our public defender's office under Ed Goehler. He has improved efficiencies by making recommendations to the legislators to change from secretaries to paralegals and adding staff.

We have made changes to how we handle assigned counsel by placing them under Mr. Purser's office. All reports and indications have shown that this is working better with quicker placement and less stress on our judges and their staff. We have received letters from judges and attorneys thanking us for the improvements.

Building and Grounds

Long overdue maintenance work has been done and the Committee has overseen the parking lot repairs, work on the courthouse stairs, completed updates to our heating and cooling system, and secured new lighting in our office building. We upgraded our equipment with the purchase of new mowers and a skid steer which has increased our efficiency in mowing and snow removal. They have also been renovating offices and creating more room for departments in need. Thank you Newell Wilcox for the improvements in chambers that were very much needed.

Ag/Planning/Environment

Once every decade, the legislature has the opportunity to make changes to its districts and their respective boundaries. With the results of the 2010 census finally complete planning director Dan

Dineen and the Ag/Planning/Environment Committee evaluated potential options. Beginning in 2014 the legislature will be cut from 19 to 17 members which was widely supported by the public in a vote by nearly a two to one margin in the November elections.

Through countless hours of research and discussions Danny Ross, Kathie Arnold and others have successfully followed the NYS SEQR process on the controversial Crown City Wind Farm project. This legislature has taken an active role as the lead agency, ensuring that all parties have had an opportunity to let their voices be heard. We have put ourselves in an excellent position to be informed when the time comes to make a decision on the future of this project and the possibility of leasing County landfill property for three turbines.

Personnel Committee

The Personnel committee has been working on the rules of order and we are very close to finalizing how we recommend Department heads to the full legislature. We have already agreed that only the legislative body as a whole has appointment authority of all non-elected positions.

Budget and Finance Committee

Under Mr. Pace's leadership we have tried very hard to keep spending down and oversee the County's finances, while looking at any and all opportunities to streamline services and increase potential revenues.

The County Treasurer is the Chief Fiscal Officer of the County, and responsible for administering a \$130 million annual budget, and provide fiscal reports to the state, Budget and Finance Committee and to the legislative body. This is highly complex and technically sophisticated work requires significant management and financial expertise. Since the 2004 NYS Comptroller audit of the County Treasurer's office it has become apparent that there is a need for a change. There are no minimum qualifications for the position of County Treasurer. Switching to an appointed Comptroller will allow the County to establish qualifications and experience appropriate for this position. To make this change, we will have to go to the voters through a referendum. I will be bringing information and job descriptions from other counties to a legislative workshop in the near future.

Health and Human Services

Sandy Price's committee oversees some of the busiest departments that serve our local County in so many different ways. Their accomplishments are too numerous to mention, but every decision this committee makes greatly impacts everyone in our County from nutrition to mental health, and quality of life issues. Early in 2013 the County endorsed the DenteMax dental program. This program will help uninsured and underinsured residents of Cortland receive discounted dental services similar to the ProAct prescription drug benefit card implemented by the health committee in years past. This card makes dental services accessible to all.

Medicaid has been a long-standing fiscal challenge for all counties in New York State as costs having been steadily increasing for many years. Although our County will still be obligated to pay over \$10.3 million for Medicaid in future years, we look forward to these costs becoming truly capped in the next state fiscal year so that our expenditures will no longer increase in this area.

BDC/IBA

The Cortland County Business Development Corporation and Industrial Development Agency played a significant role in securing the Byrne dairy manufacturing development in the Finger Lakes East Business Park. Having Byrne Dairy build a manufacturing plant in Cortland County is huge for our local farmers and other businesses. It will provide 70 well-paying jobs, which in turn will allow people to buy houses and spend money supporting local businesses in our County.

This is just one of the many projects that our BDC/IDA board has been working on successfully. Thank you all who faithfully serve on these boards.

Shared Services

As NYS mandates continue to take most of our tax dollars, the County, City and Towns need to continue to explore ways to share and consolidate services. One example of such a collaboration already in place is the 911 department. This department answered three nonemergency complaint lines with over 17,000 calls in 2012. Nearly 20,000 calls were to dispatch city police services during 2012, not to mention the number of calls to dispatch the city fire department to all fire and EMS calls in the city.

The County Area Agency on Aging and nutrition program offers services for residents in the city, and in rural towns, to help them maintain an active and involved quality of life. Yet another example of intermunicipal cooperation is the County working with the city for solid waste management. The city currently accepts 8,000,000 gallons of leachate from the County landfill County, and in exchange the County accepts about 2,700 tons of sludge from the city's wastewater treatment plant. We need to continue to work on ways that we can reduce the cost of both operations by working together.

As the 2014 budget preparation approaches, we must once again look at every department to maximize efficiencies and reduce spending to stay within the tax cap which is 2% or based on the rate of inflation, whichever is lower.

Going forward, we must as a legislative body, along with our administration and department heads work together to solve County problems so that we can all continue to enjoy the high quality of life that Cortland County offers. I look forward to solving the challenges we face in the next six months together as a legislative body. I have full confidence that we are up to the challenge and that we will persevere. I truly want this to be a County that my children and grandchildren can enjoy as much as I have in my lifetime and I'm proud that this legislature has helped to create a place I am proud to call home. I look forward to your continued support.

Thank you and God bless all.

Michael Park, Chairman